United Nations

Committee on Information

Report on the twenty-fourth session (22 April-2 May 2002)

General Assembly
Official Records
Fifty-seventh Session
Supplement No. 21 (A/57/21)

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United Nations • New York, 2002

Note

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ISSN 0255-190X

[7 June 2002]

Contents

Chapter		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–15	1
II.	Organizational questions	16–24	3
	A. Opening of the session	16	3
	B. Officers	17	3
	C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work	18–20	3
	D. Observers	21–22	3
	E. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day	23	4
	F. Other matters	24	4
III.	General debate	25–58	4
IV.	Consideration of the reports of the Secretary-General	59–69	9
V.	Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session	70–72	11
Annexes			
I.	Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information at the opening of the twenty-fourth session of the Committee, held on 22 April 2002		22
II.	Statement by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information at the opening of the twenty-fourth session of the Committee, held on 22 April 2002		24

Chapter I
Introduction

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In section I, paragraph 2, of its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly",

and requested the Committee on Information and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in its resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group,[1] reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182 and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. The Committee on Information agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to fifty-first sessions (see resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162 A and B, 43/60 A and B, 44/50, 45/76 A and B, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B, 49/38 B, 50/31 B and 51/138 B), the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee[2] and its recommendations and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in its resolution 34/182. At its fifty-second session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[3] and adopted consensus resolutions 52/70 A and B of 10 December 1997. At its fifty-third session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[4] and adopted consensus resolutions 53/59 A and B of 3 December 1998. At its fifty-fourth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[5] and adopted consensus resolutions 54/82 A and B of 6 December 1999. At its fifty-fifth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[6] and adopted consensus resolutions 55/136 A and B of 8 December 2000. At its fifty-sixth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[7] and adopted consensus resolutions 56/64 A and B of 10 December 2001 and 24 December 2001, respectively.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session, the Assembly appointed Malta as a new member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, the Assembly appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe as new members of the Committee; and at its forty-fourth session, the Assembly appointed Nepal as a new member.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay as members. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 and appointed Burkina Faso as a member.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 79 to 81 and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal as members.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 81 to 83 and appointed Gabon and Israel as members.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 83 to 88 and appointed Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa as members.

10. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 88 to 89 and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a member.

11. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 89 to 90 and appointed Georgia as a member.

12. At its fifty-third session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 90 to 93 and appointed Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands as members.

13. At its fifty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 93 to 95 and appointed Liberia and Mozambique as members of the Committee.

14. At its fifty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 95 to 97 and appointed Armenia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya as members of the Committee. Furthermore, the admission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to membership in the United Nations, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/12 of 1 November 2000, terminated the membership of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in all organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations, including the Committee on Information. At its fifty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 96 to 98 and appointed Azerbaijan and Monaco as members.

15. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Liberia
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Malta
Mexico
Monaco
Mongolia
Morocco
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Zimbabwe

Chapter II
Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

16. The organizational meeting of the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on Information was held on 22 April 2002 at United Nations Headquarters. The session was opened by the Chairman of the Committee, Milos Alcalay (Venezuela).

B. Officers

17. The officers of the Committee on Information for the period 2001-2002 are as follows:

Chairman:
Milos Alcalay (Venezuela)

Vice-Chairmen:
Ivan Matchavariani (Georgia)
Tserenpil Dorjsuren (Mongolia)
Peter Mollema (Netherlands)

Rapporteur:
Walid A. Haggag (Egypt)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

18. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/2002/1/Rev.1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
3. Statement by the Chairman.
4. Statement by the Interim Head, Department of Public Information.
5. General debate.
6. Consideration of reports submitted by the Secretary-General.
7. Open-ended working group of the Committee on Information.
8. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day.
9. Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

19. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its twenty-fourth session at United Nations Headquarters from 22 April to 2 May 2002.

20. For its consideration of agenda item 6, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on:

(a) Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2002/2);

(b) United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) (A/AC.198/2002/3);

(c) Integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme: continued implementation of the views of host Governments (A/AC.198/2002/4);

(d) Substantive questions: role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping (A/AC.198/2002/5);

(e) Continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site in the six official languages (A/AC.198/2002/6);

(f) Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2001 (A/AC.198/2002/7).

D. Observers

21. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Central African Republic, Estonia, Iraq, Saint Lucia, Saudi Arabia, Sweden and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Holy See also participated as an observer.

22. Representatives of the following specialized agencies also participated as observers: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization. The World Association of Former United Nations Interns and Fellows, Inc., and the International Organization of la Francophonie also participated as observers.

E. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day

23. On 2 May 2002, the Committee observed World Press Freedom Day 2002 with an event on media and international terrorism, organized by the Department of Public Information. The Deputy Secretary-General opened the meeting, which was also addressed by the Chairman of the Committee on Information, the Director of the Bureau of Public Information of UNESCO and the Chairman of the World Press Freedom Committee. A number of distinguished print and broadcast journalists took part in a panel discussion on the theme "Covering the War on Global Terror", which also featured a videotaped interview with Mariane Pearl, widow of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl. Free press issues that had arisen or taken on special significance in the aftermath of recent terrorist activities, such as national and international security versus freedom of the press, televised coverage of terrorism trials and the safety of journalists, were addressed. The event was moderated by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information.

F. Other matters

24. The Chairman informed the Committee that Saudi Arabia had requested to become a member of the Committee on Information.

Chapter III
General debate

25. Statements in the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee on Information: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, China, Costa Rica (on behalf of the Rio Group), Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Ghana, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica (on behalf of the Caribbean Community), Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain (on behalf of the European Union), Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Venezuela (on behalf of the Group of 77) and Yemen.

26. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, many speakers said that they attached great importance to the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, which in 2002 would be observed on 2 May. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, spoke of the freedom of expression as a universal right that "knows no borders" and stressed that an independent media was crucial in building democracy. His group condemned acts of violence "to silence journalists", or to suppress and distort information, and mourned the journalists who had given their lives in the line of duty. Those views were shared by a number of other delegations.

27. All speakers in the general debate pointed to the critical role of information in development and the achievement of social justice. A number spoke of the bitter contradiction inherent in the fact that astounding advances in information and communication technologies were serving to deepen the digital divide between the developed and the developing countries. One delegation said that, unfortunately, the real concern for a vast majority of the world's peoples was not the latest software but, rather, the bread to live. Many Committee members emphasized the continuing importance of the establishment of a new world information and communications order based on the free and balanced flow of information. One delegation said that some countries used the mass media to distort the reality of developing countries.

28. In the view of many speakers, the United Nations, as a whole, and the Department of Public Information, in particular, had an essential role to play in seeking to bridge that digital divide. They spoke of the urgent need to harness information technology for the equal benefit of all people everywhere, in keeping with the goals of the Millennium Declaration. Many agreed that the technology was especially important for the African continent. One speaker said that it was essential that the focus be on "needy customers", which were the developing countries. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that the United Nations had indeed begun to address the role of information and communications technology in development and to examine how to make all countries part of that "irreversible process". That speaker, and another delegation on behalf of a group, pointed to the importance of the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society. In that connection, one speaker in particular praised the Secretary-General for the

establishment of the United Nations Information Technology Service, the Health InterNetwork and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force.

29. All delegations strongly supported the Secretary-General's commitment to enhanced communications as a key element in the reform and revitalization of the United Nations in a new information age, and to developing a culture of communications within the Organization. In that connection, one delegation said it was unfortunate that cuts in the programme budget for upgrading equipment in 2002-2003 would affect the ability of the United Nations to carry out its information dissemination activities and that, accordingly, adequate resources should be provided to the Department of Public Information to implement its current and future programmes.

30. All speakers agreed that the Department of Public Information was the "voice" of the United Nations and that its principal goal was to raise the level of popular awareness of the Organization's aims and activities and build broad-based support for its work. One delegation characterized the Department as "the umbilical cord" that tied the Organization to the outside world. The general view expressed by delegations was that a clear relationship should be established between the Secretary-General's road map for the millennium development goals and the programmes of the Department.

31. Many speakers were of the opinion that the Secretary-General's comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department of Public Information, as called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, should aim at strengthening the role of the Department, not diminishing it, and should focus on its relevant and mandated functions. One delegation emphasized the need for the Department to consult with the Member States in the review process, especially those that were the developing countries.

32. A number of delegations pointed to the important role of the Committee on Information in determining the information and communications policies for the Organization. In that connection, one delegation "regretted deeply" the divisiveness and "extremist positions" in other committees which aimed to circumvent the Committee. Another speaker said that it would be seeking the Committee's support for adopting language reasserting the role of the Committee as the main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations relating to the work of the Department.

33. A number of delegations cautioned that budgetary considerations alone should not determine the continuing provision of long-established activities and services to Member States. They were of the view that the Committee must first examine the Secretary-General's comprehensive review of the Department before a decision was taken in any other forum. One Committee member said that the review should not be considered from "the principal angle of financial considerations", since the political importance and beneficial results which derived from the Department's activities were factors to be considered above all others. One delegation said that reform must not become "a hostage to finance". One speaker maintained that some activities had "intangible benefits", for example the exhibits in the public lobby, and for those, alternate sources of financing could be sought. In that regard, another speaker pointed to the benefits of the travelling exhibits in particular.

34. All Committee members expressed strong support for the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information and for the work that he was carrying out to strengthen further the communications function within the Organization. Committee members recognized that the report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2002/2) was the main focus of the debate and acknowledged that it was a sound basis for deliberations. In principle, all delegations supported the strengthening of the Department and the broad directions being contemplated to improve its efficiency. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, suggested that the Department could benefit from a reorganization of its activities to ensure the efficient utilization of limited resources. One speaker pledged his country's support for the Department's efforts to position itself better so as to carry out its mandates more effectively in an "ever-changing information environment", and noted at the same time that mandates should be reviewed on a regular basis. Another suggested that "clear-headed proposals", such as the one pertaining to the Cartography Section, should be addressed. One delegation found the proposals to eliminate services "alienating". In the

reorientation process, several speakers said that they supported increased coordination between the Department and other Secretariat departments, which would entail the need for a more "direct interface" structure. Similarly, several delegations stressed the need for the components of the Organization to speak with one voice and, in that connection, they hailed the possibilities of the United Nations Communications Group for improving coordination within the system.

35. Many speakers noted that reform was a process, not an event, and that the reorientation of the Department should be characterized as a work in progress, since constant re-evaluation was necessary in any institution to meet changing needs. A number of delegations expressed their support for the Department's new focus on performance management, programme effectiveness and efficiency. They were supportive of the drive to reach out to specially targeted audiences and to understand "customer needs" in the Department's information activities. While agreeing with the goal of creating a culture of evaluation within the Department, one speaker, on behalf of a large group, said that evaluations must not always be based on numbers alone, but on the overall impact of activities, especially in the developing world. Similarly, one delegation expressed the view that it was not always easy to quantify the Department's activities.

36. With regard to the proposed new "mission statement" for the Department, there were differing points of view. Several speakers supported it, while others were not convinced that it effectively captured the essence of General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 1946. One speaker, however, strongly welcomed it. In terms of the suggested new name for the Department, two delegations expressed concern.

37. Several speakers underlined their support for the Department's working through intermediaries, such as the media, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations. One delegation focused on the importance of the Department's cooperation with non-governmental organizations and said that they were a broad and democratic base of support within civil society for the principles and goals of the United Nations.

38. All speakers pointed to the enormous outreach possibilities opened up by the communications revolution and strongly supported the Department's embrace of new technology in all its aspects. They unanimously commended the Department for developing and enhancing the United Nations web site, which they saw as a major communications tool to extend the direct reach of the United Nations around the world. One delegation, in referring to the millions of daily "hits" on the site, characterized the progress as "remarkable". At the same time, one delegation questioned the need for the Department to employ an outside contractor to rationalize the web site and believed that the rationalization and enhancement should be done through the Department's in-house expertise.

39. Many speakers were of the strong opinion that more must be done to improve the multilingual character of the United Nations web site and to achieve the goal of parity among all six official languages. As one speaker on behalf of a large group said, major efforts were needed to "preserve the plurality of languages" in information output. They appealed for equal treatment of all six official languages both on the Internet and in the Department's print products. One speaker said that efforts must be made in this regard "without distinction and without discrimination". Several speakers, including one on behalf of a large group, noted that the Spanish language was second to English in terms of accesses on the web site. It therefore followed that the Department must make special efforts to enhance the Spanish web site. The availability of Arabic language materials was a main concern for a number of speakers. Several speakers welcomed the achievement of the web pages in the Russian language.

40. Several delegations expressed the view that the Department should establish identical management structures for each of the language units, to enable them to develop in a more balanced way. One delegation agreed that this was necessary, including for the Chinese language. Another speaker was emphatic in asserting that one of the options which the Department was putting forward as a means towards achieving the goal of linguistic parity on the web site was unsatisfactory. While appreciating the problems involved, his delegation did not believe there was an alternative to translating all the information available on the web site in English into the other official languages. In his delegation's view, the full linguistic parity called for by the General Assembly could only be brought about by the necessary political will and the provision of additional financial resources. On a

positive note, one delegation said that the linkage of the Official Documents System with the freely accessible United Nations web site would significantly enhance the multilingual nature of the site and lead to cost efficiencies. It also stated that it would be proposing that the Secretary-General report on the subject to the Committee at its next session.

41. One delegation was emphatic that information sources must be reliable and, in that context, pointed to an error on the web site relating to his country, which he said required further analysis. Another singled out for praise the Department's *CyberSchoolBus* project on the Internet, as well as the *UN Works* site. Several speakers supported the move towards creating one central Internet portal to encompass the web sites of the system.

42. Many speakers emphasized their continuing concern that the utilization of new technologies should not be at the cost of traditional means of communication, which were still the main source of information in most developing countries. In that connection, a number of delegations pointed to the importance of radio, especially in Africa, as a cost-effective and far-reaching means of outreach and, in that context, expressed their strong support for the live radio project. Several delegations said that the project should be put on a stable footing. Another speaker noted that the Department's outreach through a broadcasting arrangement in his country was reaching a record number of listeners in Africa. One delegation suggested that the time of the live broadcast in Asia be rescheduled for the convenience of that large audience. One speaker emphasized the need for a systematic evaluation of the international radio broadcasting project, especially since the General Assembly had approved it for an initial two-year period, and looked forward to the provision of detailed listenership surveys, which would help inform both the Department's and the Committee's evaluation.

43. Another speaker expressed appreciation for the taped radio programmes in Bahasa Indonesia. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that its members were pleased with the programming provided by the Caribbean Radio Unit and at the same time called for the reinstatement of the Caribbean Magazine programme. That speaker also called again upon the Department to introduce radio programming in Creole for the Haitian public.

44. Another speaker, on behalf of a large group, said that it was important for the Department's radio and television output to take advantage of new platforms and, in that regard, proposed that the Secretary-General consider launching a feasibility study for a global television satellite network. One delegation denounced the aggression that it was facing from the radio and television programming of another Member State, on a daily basis on many frequencies. It was an "electronic war", which was in violation of its national sovereignty and international law.

45. A number of countries said that their delegations attached great importance to the daily press releases, issued by the Department in English and French, as they were essential to the work of those countries with small missions, whose staff were unable to attend all the daily meetings. One speaker said that they were particularly valuable to "those of us from Africa with limited resources". Several speakers also pointed to the Department's new e-mail NewsAlert, which was proving very useful to the media in their countries. A number of speakers said that their countries attached great importance to the Department's training programme for broadcasters and journalists, with one delegation noting "with surprise" the cutbacks in that programme, which would be detrimental to developing countries.

46. The Department's flagship publications, namely the *Yearbook of the United Nations* and the *United Nations Chronicle*, were of special interest to several delegations. They were in agreement that the former was of a high quality and useful as the only authoritative reference work on the Organization. There were, however, differing opinions on the latter. One speaker characterized the *Chronicle* as "stimulating and thought-provoking", while another considered that its production needed to be justified in relation to its readership and impact, and that resources might be reprogrammed elsewhere in the Department.

47. Several speakers hailed the Dag Hammarskjöld Library as the institutional memory of the Organization and "a virtual library with world outreach", and one commended it on the attainment of its fortieth anniversary. The latter delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, praised the level of the support offered by the Library and said that the training programmes were of "immense benefit" to permanent missions at Headquarters, as well as to depository librarians in developing countries. One speaker was pleased to note

that a reprioritizing of functions in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was being contemplated and was of the view that its technical services functions should be automated and rationalized, thereby freeing its "considerable professional expertise" to priority Secretariat-wide information support activities.

48. Many speakers pointed to the call by the General Assembly to maintain and improve activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and those with special needs, including countries in transition. In that regard, they strongly supported the Department's alignment of its activities with the Millennium Declaration and with the major issues emphasized by the Secretary-General: poverty eradication, conflict prevention, sustainable development, the environment, human rights, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the battle against international terrorism and the needs of the African continent. They supported the advocacy and outreach activities of the Department in a number of major areas of international concern. Several said that the information work on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001), which had helped to prioritize tolerance, had been noteworthy.

49. Delegations pointed to a number of the Department's successful advocacy activities, such as those for the recent International Conference on Financing for Development, held at Monterrey, Mexico, the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held at Madrid, and in support of the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg, South Africa. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, called on the Department to coordinate the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

50. Many delegations supported the Department's important role in the global fight against terrorism, which in their view posed a very real and dangerous threat to humanity. Several, in particular, hailed the creation of the multilingual "UN action against terrorism" page on the web site and another suggested the creation of a world forum on how civil society and media could combat terrorism. One delegation said that, in the light of the events of 11 September 2001, it was vital that the United Nations work to inform the world's people on peace, development and human rights.

51. One speaker said that the Department must prioritize its work on the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, as people in the Non-Self-Governing Territories must be permitted to exercise their right to self-determination. Another delegation appreciated the observance of International Women's Day, which it said had "international reverberations". One speaker called for information on the problems of the Semipalatinsk region. Several delegations expressed their appreciation to the Department for its work relating to the Chernobyl disaster and for providing objective information on its dimensions.

52. The turmoil in the Middle East and the sufferings of the Palestinian people were a major focus for a number of speakers and, in that connection, they called for the full implementation of all information activities endorsed by the General Assembly in the special information programme on the question of Palestine until a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question was achieved. They were of the view that those information activities on Palestine had clearly gained increased significance during the current difficult times, which required enhanced efforts to shed light on the suffering of the Palestinian people subjected to occupation, their legitimate right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State. One speaker expressed appreciation for the Department's training programme for Palestinian journalists.

53. A number of speakers, including one on behalf of a large group, were of the view that adequate information components were crucial to the success of peacekeeping missions and should therefore be strengthened. One delegation noted approvingly that the Department had continued to provide planning and operational support to information components of peacekeeping operations and peace missions, such as those in Kosovo, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, East Timor and Afghanistan. One delegation questioned the Department's request for additional resources from the support account for peacekeeping operations and thought it should be delayed until consideration of the comprehensive review of the Department was completed.

54. Many speakers pointed to the importance they attached to the work of the information centres, which they saw as United Nations windows on the world, especially in developing countries. Several delegations

also noted that the role of the centres in developing countries was particularly important, since, in the words of one speaker, "access to technology eludes the majority of the population". A number of speakers agreed that the integration of information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) should be on a case-by-case basis, taking the views of host countries into account. Another delegation expressed its appreciation for the care displayed by the Secretariat in respecting the specific criteria and guidance approved by the General Assembly for the integration of those centres. One speaker supported the United Nations houses initiative and said that there was "ample opportunity" for better coordination, cooperation and consolidation of United Nations system-wide field offices.

55. Regarding the information centres, a number of delegations referred to the reorientation report and to specific comments contained in it. On the subject of establishing regional hubs, several members suggested that the idea be given more thought, one suggesting it was a bit "premature". However, another delegation endorsed that proposal in areas where "linguistic commonalities facilitate regionalization". Mindful of the high costs of rental and rent-related expenses in selected developed countries, many said they supported the further study of the allocation of staff and financial resources to the centres, which would be, as one delegation described it, "a cost-benefit analysis". Some delegations referred to the possibility of redirecting resources from information centres in those developed countries where the rental costs were exceptionally high to other priority areas, including to centres in developing countries. One speaker firmly agreed with the suggestion that practical criteria should be established with regard to the location of information centres.

56. Concerning the work of specific centres, one representative said that the activities of the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) Tokyo were highly appreciated, and that his Government intended to make voluntary contributions to it. Several noted that the work of UNIC Islamabad was impressive, as had been notably demonstrated at the Department's informal briefing for Committee members. One delegation, in supporting the work of centres as a bridge to Governments and non-governmental organizations, pointed to the activities of UNIC Mexico City. Another pointed to the achievements of UNIC Moscow, which included translating information materials into Russian. One delegation noted "with appreciation" the role played by UNIC New Delhi.

57. One speaker said that, rather than being strengthened, the "reverse trend" had been the reality in recent years and that a large number of centres had been closed or merged with other offices and otherwise weakened. UNIC Dhaka was a case in point. Another delegation, on behalf of a large group, called for the establishment of the enhanced information component in the UNDP multi-island office in Kingston to complement the work of UNIC Port-of-Spain.

58. At the end of the general debate, the Interim Head of the Department made a statement, in which he responded to questions raised by delegations.

Chapter IV
Consideration of the reports of the Secretary-General

59. Five reports of the Secretary-General were introduced by programme managers of the Department of Public Information and considered individually. The report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2002/2) was considered in the opening remarks of the Interim Head and later in the general debate and therefore did not receive a separate review.

60. Concerning the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) (A/AC.198/2002/3), the representative of the Department noted that, during the build-up for the Year, which had culminated in the plenary meetings of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly (8 and 9 November 2001), it had mobilized all available resources to publicize the meetings and raise global awareness of the aims of the Year. The Department had conducted its activities in close cooperation with the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the Year. To facilitate extensive public participation in the Year, the Department worked in close partnership with Member States and forged a broad coalition with non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and private sector bodies. The observance of the Year and the issuance of the publication of the Group of Eminent Persons, entitled "Crossing the Divide", had

provided the Department with a foundation on which to carry on the dialogue among various groups in society at all levels, from local and national to international. The United Nations continued to remain the true home of the dialogue among civilizations and, through the continuing promotion of dialogue in all parts of the world, the Department hoped to contribute to the creation of lasting peace within and between civilizations.

61. One speaker said that the goals of the Year were to promote mutual understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The General Assembly had adopted the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, to which all Member States attached great importance. He thanked the Department for the important contributions it had made to publicize the Year, emphasizing that that would be a long-term campaign.

62. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP (A/AC.198/2002/4), a representative of the Department said that it was continuing to implement the views of Member States hosting information centres integrated with the field offices of UNDP in order to strengthen further the efficiency of public information activities. Currently, there was no pending proposal to integrate any additional information centre. However, should any request be forthcoming, the Department would review it jointly with UNDP and the Government of the host country concerned prior to submitting it to the Committee on Information for consideration.

63. Building on their 20-year working relationship, the Department and UNDP had continued to look for ways and means to improve the delivery of public information programmes and strengthen the unified image of the United Nations. They had created a joint working group in September 2001 to review all aspects of cooperation in the area of public information at the field level. In addition, the Department noted that, owing to the personal efforts of the Administrator of UNDP, the United Nations resident coordinators had become increasingly attentive to the key role of information. The Department also emphasized that integration was on a case-by-case basis and was not intended to be a "one-size-fits-all" solution, and emphasized that the Secretary-General appreciated the continued support which United Nations information centres received from their host countries.

64. A representative of the Department said, with reference to the integration exercise, that the General Assembly had set out clear guidelines, which were contained in the annual resolution on questions relating to information, and which the Department followed carefully. In response to one delegation's specific question on paragraph 8 of the report, the representative of Department said that it should be possible to make available, as requested, the results of the review currently being conducted on the formal agreement of 1990 on cooperation between the Department and UNDP.

65. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on the role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping (A/AC.198/2002/5), a representative of the Department said that, in implementation of the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions and working closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department had continued to provide planning and operational support to information components of peacekeeping operations, to the extent possible. Enhancing that capacity, as supported by the Assembly, would enable the Department to contribute more effectively in those areas, as well as to efforts undertaken by mission information components to build and sustain public and governmental support for peacekeeping operations. The Department was doing its utmost, but could not do more until additional resources were forthcoming.

66. In highlighting paragraph 22 of the report, a representative of the Department said that, despite the General Assembly's endorsement of the information support functions of the Department of Public Information, the number of staff dedicated to public information in United Nations peacekeeping had remained at the same level. Several speakers noted that, in that paragraph, it was also stated that the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on requirements for funding under the support account for peacekeeping operations for the period from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003 would include a provision for additional resources for the Department of Public Information for "backstopping peacekeeping operations". One delegation asked if there was any more specific relevant information available and another asked if resources could be transferred from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to the Department of Public Information. Another delegation

commended the information support for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone as an example of a good programme for peace-building.

67. A representative of the Department introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site in the six official languages (A/AC.198/2002/6) and explained that it was the fifth in a series addressing this issue. There were two courses of action being suggested for consideration. Action 1 called for replicating all materials on the English web site in the other language sites. Action 2 would allow the web sites to develop independently in each language on the basis of the resource capacities of author departments and offices, and was being recommended for approval. The Department noted that replicating all materials would require substantial resources, although the situation would be much improved if the *United Nations Treaty Series* were to be exempted. It was clear, however, that the achievement of the goal of linguistic parity would be a long-range project. The representative of the Department noted, on a positive note, that the introduction of more automated methods of translation in the future could "dramatically" reduce translation costs, as the technology developed.

68. One delegation stated that, in its view, the proposed action 2 was a continuation of the status quo and the disparity was increasing. In its view, action 1 was the only real solution and it was hoped that the Committee would support it, although there could be room for some compromise. Several speakers pointed to the continuing need to implement paragraph 57 of General Assembly resolution 56/64 B, in which the Assembly called for the equitable distribution of financial and human resources within the Department allocated to the United Nations web site among all official languages on a continuous basis. The Department provided the clarification that, in terms of the structure of web site management in the Department, there was an equitable distribution of resources in web site management, while programming and design were common among the languages. However, resources for content creation were not equitably allocated in the budget. The web site was a "storefront" and, before full language parity could be achieved, the content had first to be created in other author areas.

69. A representative of the Department introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2001 (A/AC.198/2002/7) and highlighted some of the key elements of the twenty-seventh session of the Committee, held at Geneva in July 2001 at the headquarters of the World Intellectual Property Organization. It was noted that, in October 2001, as part of its review, the Administrative Committee on Coordination, renamed the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, decided to do away with its permanent subsidiary bodies. As a result, as from January 2002, inter-agency coordination would be carried out through a new informal and flexible mechanism, the United Nations Communications Group. The Department said that the Committee on Information would be kept fully apprised of inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information, although the reporting obligation, per se, no longer applied. It was expected that those new arrangements for inter-agency coordination in the field of communications would contribute to building a culture of communications within the United Nations system.

Chapter V
Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session

70. At its 6th plenary meeting, the Committee proceeded to adopt by consensus the draft report, including the following two draft resolutions and draft decision:

Draft resolution A
Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[8]

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned,

reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim at, in addition to bilateral cooperation, providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[9] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

Draft resolution B
United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to it relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Concurring with the view of the Secretary-General that the fundamental premise underlying the reorientation efforts of the Department of Public

Information remains General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, establishing the Department of Public Information, which states in paragraph 2 of annex I to the resolution that the activities of the Department of Public Information should be so organized and directed as to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among the peoples of the world,

Concurring also with the view of the Secretary-General that the contents of public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations and that a culture of communications should permeate all levels of the Organization, as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations, in accordance with the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in order to create broad-based global support for the United Nations,

Stressing that the primary mission of the Department of Public Information is to provide, through its outreach activities, accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information to the public on the tasks and responsibilities of the United Nations in order to strengthen international support for the activities of the Organization with the greatest transparency,

Reaffirming that the Department of Public Information must prioritize its work programme while respecting existing mandates and in line with rule 5.6 of the Rules and Regulations Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, to focus its message and concentrate its efforts better and, as a function of performance management, to match its programmes with the needs of its target audiences, on the basis of improved feedback and evaluation mechanisms,

Stating that the comprehensive review of the work of the Department of Public Information, being prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, and the embracing of a strategic direction which the Department has to consider as a result, provides an opportunity to take further steps to rationalize in order to maintain, eliminate, enhance or reduce its activities and output, to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness, to maximize the use of its resources and, finally, to establish a departmental structure to accomplish these goals,

Expressing its concern that the gap in the information and communication technologies between the developed and the developing countries has continued to widen and that vast segments of the population in developing countries are not benefiting from the present information and technology revolution and, in this regard, underlining the necessity of rectifying the imbalances of the global information and technology revolution in order to make it more just, equitable and effective,

Recognizing that developments in the information and communication technology revolution open vast new opportunities for economic growth and social development and can play an important role in the eradication of poverty in developing countries and, at the same time, emphasizing that it also poses challenges and risks and could lead to the further widening of disparities between and within countries,

Stating that the present developments and rapid changes in the field of information and communication technology have a tremendous impact on the functioning of the United Nations and the Department of Public Information in particular, which may necessitate suitable adjustments in the manner in which the mandate of the Department is implemented, as a key element in the reform and revitalization of the United Nations in a new information age,

Recognizing that the mix of means used by the Department of Public Information to disseminate its message remains a key area for review and, in this regard, that the Department should rely on reaching the public through existing external media to a greater degree than at present,

Recalling its resolution 56/262 of 15 February 2002 on multilingualism, and emphasizing the importance of making appropriate use of the official languages in the activities of the Department of Public Information, aiming to eliminate the disparity between the use of English and the other five official languages,

Welcoming Azerbaijan and Monaco to membership in the Committee on Information,

I. Introduction

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, in which it established the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, and all other relevant General Assembly resolutions related to the activities of the Department;

2. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to continue to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993 and other mandates as established by the General Assembly;

3. *Emphasizes* the importance of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 as a guideline that sets out the overall orientation of the public information programme for the Organization's goals through effective communication;

4. *Welcomes* the efforts of the Secretary-General to conduct and submit a comprehensive review on the management and operations of the Department of Public Information to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, and encourages the Secretary-General to present wide-ranging innovative proposals for the Department that should take into account the issue raised in the current resolution;

5. *Requests* the Department of Public Information, following the priorities laid down by the General Assembly and using the United Nations Millennium Declaration[10] as its guide, to pay particular attention to major issues: eradication of poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic, the battle against international terrorism and the needs of the African continent;

6. *Concurs* with the Secretary-General on the need to enhance the technological infrastructure of the Department of Public Information to widen its outreach as well as to improve the United Nations web site;

7. *Acknowledges* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing countries in disseminating information on priority issues;

II. General activities of the Department of Public Information

8. *Notes* the efforts made by the Department of Public Information, in the context of the progress report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications[11] and the ongoing comprehensive review, to articulate to Member States the challenges it faces in improving its efficiency and productivity, and encourages the Secretary-General to continue the reorientation exercise, including wide-ranging and possibly new innovative proposals, taking into account broad principles and directions contained in the present resolution, and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session;

9. *Reaffirms* that the Department of Public Information is the focal point for information policies of the United Nations and the primary news centre for information about the United Nations and its activities and those of the Secretary-General, and encourages a closer integration of functions between the Department and those offices providing spokesman services for the Secretary-General;

10. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in the context of the reorientation process, to continue to exert all efforts to ensure that publications and other information services of the Secretariat, including the United Nations web site and the United Nations News Service, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and that they maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

11. *Notes* the submission by the Secretary-General of his report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications,[11] and welcomes the progress achieved since the commencement of the reorientation exercise in enhancing the performance and effectiveness of the Department of Public Information in accordance with the mandates established by the General Assembly and the recommendations of the Committee on Information;

12. *Welcomes* the movement of the Department of Public Information towards a new "evaluation culture" of increased performance management, based on, inter alia, an annual programme impact review, as

well as feedback from Member States, where appropriate;

13. *Welcomes also* the intention of the Department of Public Information to examine further areas of duplication and fragmentation of functions in the structure of the Department as well as opportunities for greater coordination within the Secretariat as a whole and within the United Nations system in order to avoid overlapping of efforts in the implementation of its mandates and activities;

14. *Notes* the intention of the Secretary-General to conduct a comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department of Public Information and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session in accordance with resolution 56/253, and recognizes that the comprehensive review of the Department is intended to facilitate the process of reorientation;

15. *Requests* the Committee on Information to examine thoroughly the comprehensive review once it has been finalized and to submit its recommendations thereon to the General Assembly, and stresses in this context the importance of respecting the principal competence of the Committee to undertake the examination and submit its recommendations prior to the consideration of the review by any other body;

16. *Calls upon* Member States to ensure, to the extent possible, that recommendations relating to the programme of work of the Department of Public Information originate and are considered in the Committee on Information;

17. *Takes note of* the proposed mission statement of the Department of Public Information,[12] and emphasizes the importance, when implementing the mandates established by the General Assembly, of direct outreach activities to Member States and the public and of the use of such intermediaries as the media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions;

18. *Encourages* the Secretary-General, while maintaining the information programmes and activities mandated by the General Assembly until any alternative future decision has been taken on this matter upon the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to continue the study and consideration of certain organizational changes;

19. *Urges* the Department of Public Information to continue to exhibit, to the largest extent possible, transparency in order to increase awareness of the impact of its programmes and activities;

20. *Emphasizes* that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation contributes to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications;

21. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue consultations with the Committee on Information prior to taking any decision on the possible changing of its title;

22. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to strengthen the coordination between the Department of Public Information and other departments of the Secretariat, and underlines that public information capacities and activities in other departments should function under the guidance of the Department of Public Information;

23. *Welcomes* the initiatives that have been taken by the Department of Public Information to strengthen the public information system of the United Nations, and, in this regard, stresses the importance of a coherent and results-oriented approach being undertaken by the United Nations, the specialized agencies and the programmes and funds of the United Nations system involved in public information activities and the provision of resources for their implementation, and that this be done taking into account feedback from Member States on the relevance and effectiveness of its programme delivery;

24. *Welcomes also* the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2001,[13] commends the Department of Public Information on its active and constructive participation in the Committee, particularly its efforts in promoting inter-agency coordination in the field of public information, encourages the Department to play a key role in the newly-established United Nations Communications Group, takes note of the efforts being undertaken by the Group to develop further several key initiatives, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the

Committee on Information at its consecutive sessions on the activities of the Group;

25. *Recognizes* the need for the Department of Public Information to increase its outreach activities in all regions, and reiterates the need to include, in the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications, an analysis of the present reach and scope of the Department's activities, identifying the widest possible spectrum of audiences and geographical areas which are not covered adequately and which may require special attention, including the appropriate means of communication, and bearing in mind local language requirements;

26. *Appreciates* the continued efforts of the Department of Public Information in issuing daily press releases, and requests the Department to continue providing this invaluable service to both Member States and representatives of the media, while considering possible means of improving their production process and streamlining their format, structure and length, keeping in mind the views of Member States and the fact that other departments may be providing similar or overlapping services in this regard;

III. Multilingualism and public information

27. *Emphasizes* the importance of ensuring the full, equitable treatment of all the official languages of the United Nations in all activities of the Department of Public Information, and stresses the importance of fully implementing its resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997, in section C of which it requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the texts of all new public documents in all six official languages and information materials of the United Nations are made available through the United Nations web site daily and are accessible to Member States without delay;

28. *Reaffirms* its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that the Department of Public Information has appropriate staffing capacity in all official languages of the United Nations to undertake all its activities;

29. *Reminds* the Secretary-General of the need to include in future programme budget proposals for the Department of Public Information the importance of using all six official languages in its activities;

IV. Promotional campaigns

30. *Recognizes* that promotional campaigns aimed at supporting special sessions and international conferences of the United Nations are part of the core responsibility of the Department of Public Information, and welcomes the efforts of the Department to examine creative ways by which it can organize and implement these campaigns in partnership with the substantive departments concerned;

31. *Recognizes also* the need for enhanced publicity through a targeted strategy to be developed by the Department of Public Information on the forthcoming special sessions, international conferences and promotional campaigns of the United Nations pertaining to global issues using the United Nations Millennium Declaration as its guide;

32. *Supports* the efforts of the Department of Public Information, while ensuring respect for the priorities established by the General Assembly, to focus its promotional campaigns also on those major issues identified by the Secretary-General as referred to in paragraph 5 of the present resolution;

33. *Appreciates* the work of the Department of Public Information in promoting, through its campaigns, issues of importance to the international community, such as sustainable development, children, HIV/AIDS and decolonization, as well as the dialogue among civilizations and the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, and encourages the Department, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of these and other important global issues;

34. *Encourages* the Department of Public Information to continue to work within the United Nations Communications Group to coordinate the implementation of communications strategies, with the heads of information of the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system;

V. Bridging the digital divide

35. *Welcomes* the decision, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/183 of 21 December 2001, to convene the World Summit on the Information Society at Geneva in December 2003 and at Tunis in December 2005;

36. *Commends* the Secretary-General for the establishment of the United Nations Information Technology Service, the Health InterNetwork and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force with a view to bridging the digital divide and as a response to the continuing gulf between developed and developing countries, welcomes the contribution of the Department of Public Information in publicizing the efforts of the Secretary-General in closing the digital divide as a means of spurring economic growth and as a response to the continuing gulf between developed and developing countries, and, in this context, requests the Department further to enhance its role;

VI. United Nations information centres

37. *Stresses* that the United Nations information centres and information components should continue to play a significant role in disseminating information about the work of the Organization to the peoples of the world, including in the areas outlined by the United Nations Millennium Declaration, and emphasizes that the United Nations information centres, as the "field voice" of the Department of Public Information, should promote public awareness and mobilize support for the work of the United Nations at the local level, bearing in mind that information in the local languages has the strongest impact on the local populations;

38. *Requests* the Secretary-General to include in his comprehensive review the results of the ongoing review by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the Secretariat on this matter and information on the involvement of the Department of Public Information in the United Nations houses initiative;

39. *Notes* the efforts by some United Nations information centres to develop their own web pages in local languages, and encourages the Department of Public Information to provide resources and technical facilities, in particular to United Nations information centres whose web pages are not yet operational, to develop web pages in the respective local languages of their host countries, and encourages host Governments to respond to the needs of United Nations information centres;

40. *Welcomes* the efforts by the Department of Public Information to restore additional resources to those United Nations information centres that have suffered reductions in staffing and other resources as a result of budget reduction exercises undertaken in the past several years;

41. *Recalls* the appeal made by the Secretary-General to the host Governments of United Nations information centres to facilitate the work of the centres in their countries by providing rent-free or rent-subsidized premises, while taking into account the economic condition of the host Governments and bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial resources for the United Nations information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

42. *Welcomes* the ongoing efforts of the Department of Public Information to review the allocation of both staff and financial resources to United Nations information centres with a view to possibly transferring resources from information centres in developed countries to developing countries;

43. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme: continued implementation of the views of host Governments",[14] welcomes the consistent implementation by the Department of Public Information of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly with respect to the integration of United Nations information centres with the field offices of the United Nations Development Programme, and reaffirms that any proposal in this regard should be implemented only if feasible and on a case-by-case basis, while maintaining the operational and functional independence of United Nations information centres, taking into account the views of the host countries to ensure that the information functions and the autonomy of United Nations information centres are not adversely affected, to meet the policy's stated objective of improving the provision of information by the United Nations;

44. *Notes* the possibility of creating regional information centre "hubs", especially but not exclusively in areas where linguistic commonalities facilitate regionalization, stresses the need for the Committee on Information to consider a set of proposed guidelines and criteria relating to the advisability of implementing this option, and stresses also that the creation of any such "hubs", subject to the General Assembly endorsing these guidelines and

criteria, should take place in a flexible manner, if feasible, on a case-by-case basis and only with the express approval of all host countries concerned;

VII. Role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping

45. *Takes note with appreciation* of the report of the Secretary-General on the role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping;[15]

46. *Commends* the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the establishment and functioning of the information components of peacekeeping operations and of political and peace-building missions of the United Nations, including its promotional efforts and other information support activities, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department from the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other departments of the Secretariat, in particular with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations;

47. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue its efforts to strengthen its capacity to contribute significantly to the functioning of information components in United Nations peacekeeping operations, including through the development of a coherent information strategy with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations;

48. *Stresses* the importance of enhancing the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information in the field of peacekeeping operations and its role in the selection process of spokespersons for United Nations peacekeeping operations or missions, and, in this regard, encourages the Department to second spokespersons who have the necessary skills to fulfil the tasks of the operations or missions and to consider views expressed, especially by host countries, when appropriate, in this regard;

VIII. Dag Hammarskjöld Library

49. *Notes* the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General to make the Dag Hammarskjöld Library a virtual library with world outreach, making United Nations information and other acquired materials accessible electronically to a growing number of readers and users, and takes note also of the efforts of the Secretary-General to enrich on a multilingual basis the stock of books and journals in the Library, including publications on peace and security and development-related issues, to ensure that the Library continues to be a broadly accessible resource for information about the United Nations and its activities;

50. *Requests* the Secretary-General to include in his comprehensive review the results of the overall review of the United Nations system library services, including the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the libraries in the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, the libraries in the regional commissions, departmental libraries, libraries at information centres and depository libraries called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/253;

51. *Notes* its the training courses conducted by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library for the representatives of Member States and Secretariat staff on Cyberseek, web search, the Intranet, United Nations documentation, UN-I-QUE and the Official Document System of the United Nations;

IX. Traditional means of communication: radio, television and publications

52. *Stresses* that radio remains one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching traditional media available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping;

53. *Recalls* paragraph 47 of its resolution 56/64 B, in which it decided, building upon the success of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations as well as the scope of its programme distribution and established partnerships, to expand the international radio broadcasting capacity of the United Nations in all six official languages;

54. *Appreciates* that the Department of Public Information, as stated in paragraph 32 of the report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications,[11] has managed to establish partnerships with over 265 radio stations to carry its broadcasts with a potential to reach as many as 180 million listeners worldwide;

55. *Looks forward* to the report of the Secretary-General to be submitted to the Committee on

Information at its twenty-fifth session on the implementation of the United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity, including information that can be obtained from the local, national and regional radio partners about the estimated number of listeners reached and the cost-effectiveness of radio as an instrument in United Nations activities, in order for the Committee to decide on the future of this capacity;

56. *Notes* the efforts under way by the Department of Public Information to disseminate programmes directly to broadcasting stations all over the world in the six official languages as well as in other languages, and, in this regard, stresses the need for impartiality and objectivity concerning information activities of the United Nations;

57. *Emphasizes* that United Nations Radio and Television should take full advantage of the technological infrastructure made available in recent years (including satellite platforms, information and communications technologies, the Internet) and requests the Secretary-General, as a part of the reorientation of the Department of Public Information, to consider a global strategy for broadcasting, taking into account existing technologies;

58. *Notes* the importance of the continued implementation by the Department of Public Information of the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition as mandated by the General Assembly, and encourages the Department to consider how best to maximize the benefits derived from the programme by reviewing, inter alia, its duration and the number of its participants;

59. *Reiterates* that all publications of the Department of Public Information, in accordance with existing mandates, should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications of the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner, and, in this regard, requests the Secretary-General to include in his comprehensive review the relevant results of the larger review of United Nations publications and information materials called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/253;

X. United Nations web site

60. *Takes note of* the report of the Secretary-General on the continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site in the six official languages,[16] and notes the possible courses of action outlined therein;

61. *Reiterates its appreciation* for the efforts of the Department of Public Information in creating a high-quality, user-friendly and cost-effective web site, noting that this is especially noteworthy, considering the scope of this undertaking, the budget constraints within the United Nations and the remarkably rapid expansion of the World Wide Web, reaffirms that the web site remains a very useful tool for media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, Member States and the general public, and welcomes the creation of the United Nations web site on terrorism;

62. *Notes with concern* that the multilingual development and enrichment of the United Nations web site has been slower than expected because of a lack of resources, among other factors;

63. *Notes* that content-providing offices have not, in general, been making their materials on the United Nations web site available in all six official languages;

64. *Stresses* the need for adopting a decision on the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site, considering, inter alia, the possibility of organizational restructuring towards separate language units of each of the six official languages within the Department of Public Information, in order to achieve full parity among the official languages of the United Nations;

65. *Reaffirms* its request to the Secretary-General to ensure, until such a decision has been taken and implemented, to the extent possible and while maintaining an up-to-date and accurate web site, the equitable distribution of financial and human resources within the Department of Public Information allocated to the United Nations web site among all official languages on a continuous basis, and to make every possible effort to ensure that all materials contained on the web site that do not change and do not need regular maintenance are made available in all six official languages;

66. *Reaffirms also* the need of achieving full parity among the six official languages on the United Nations web site, and, in this regard, takes note of the concept of the proposal of the Secretary-General, as contained in paragraph 33 of his report,[16] to translate all English materials and databases on the United Nations web site by the respective content-providing

offices of the Secretariat into all official languages, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session on the most practical, efficient and cost-effective means of implementing this proposal;

67. *Requests* the Secretary-General to include in his report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session proposals relating to the designation of a future date by which all supporting arrangements would be in place for the implementation of this concept and after which parity would continue from that date onwards as well as to the exemption of specific items from translation on the web site;

68. *Stresses* the importance of access to the United Nations treaty collection and United Nations parliamentary documentation for the public;

69. *Encourages* the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to continue to take full advantage of recent developments in information technology, including the Internet, in order to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the expeditious dissemination of information on the United Nations, in accordance with the priorities established by the General Assembly and taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

70. *Notes* that the High-Level Committee on Management of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination has requested its Technical Adviser to prepare a preliminary study on the issue of one central Internet portal for the United Nations system to be submitted to the High-Level Committee on Management at its meeting in September 2002, and requests the Department of Public Information, as the manager of the Organization's web site, to convey the considerations of the Committee on Information on this matter and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session;

71. *Takes note* of the reports of the Secretary-General on re-engineering of the Optical Disk System (now called the Official Document System of the United Nations)[17] and on simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in electronic form in the six official languages on the United Nations web site;[18]

72. *Commends* the efforts of the Information Technology Services Division of the Office of Central Support Services of the Secretariat in ensuring that the required technological infrastructure is in place to accommodate the imminent linkage of the Official Document System to the United Nations web site, and commends also the Department of Public Information for addressing issues of content management relating to the System;

73. *Notes* that the integration of the Official Document System with the United Nations web site will significantly enhance the multilingual nature of the United Nations web site and will lead to efficiencies throughout all Secretariat departments through the elimination of duplicate formatting and posting of documents;

74. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session on the impact on the functioning of the Official Document System following implementation of the full multilingual support function and on the feasibility of providing free, public access to the System through a linkage with the United Nations web site, including options with a view to revising the current subscription policy established in General Assembly resolution 51/211 F of 15 September 1997, and expresses its intention to take a decision on the subscription policy during the main part of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly;

75. *Notes with interest* the electronic mail-based United Nations News Service distributed worldwide by e-mail by the Department of Public Information, appreciates the plan of the Department to provide this service in the other four official languages in 2002 and emphasizes that extra care needs to be taken to ensure that news-breaking stories and news alerts are accurate, impartial and free of any bias;

XI. Final remarks

76. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session and to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

77. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

78. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-eighth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

Draft decision
Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 98 to 99 and to appoint Saudi Arabia as a member of the Committee on Information.

71. Closing statements were made by the representative of Japan and by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information.

72. The Chairman noted that the Bureau had decided to meet in mid-September after the report of the Secretary-General on the comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department of Public Information had been finalized. At that time, and with due consideration of the report's contents, the Bureau would propose the future course of action for the Committee, including the possibility of a resumed session to consider the report of the Secretary-General and to finalize the Committee's recommendations to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, as appropriate.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/36/21); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* and corrigendum (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* and corrigenda (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/39/21); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/40/21); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/43/21); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/44/21); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/45/21); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/46/21); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/47/21); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/48/21); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/49/21); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/50/21); and ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/52/21/Rev.1).

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/53/21/Rev.1).

[5] Ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* and addendum (A/54/21 and Add.1).

[6] Ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/55/21).

[7] Ibid., *Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* and addendum (A/56/21 and Add.1).

[8] To be issued as *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/57/21).

[9] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980*, vol. I, *Resolutions*, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

[10] See resolution 55/2.

[11] A/AC.198/2002/2.

[12] Ibid., para. 19.

[13] A/AC.198/2002/7.

[14] A/AC.198/2002/4.

[15] A/AC.198/2002/5.

[16] A/AC.198/2002/6.

[17] A/56/120/Rev.1.

[18] A/C.5/56/12.

Annex I

Statement delivered by the Chairman of the Committee on Information at the opening of the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on 22 April 2002

1. First of all, let me tell you how grateful I am to chair the annual session of the United Nations Committee on Information for this second consecutive year.

2. I am gratified that over the past year I have been able to witness the dynamism and very varied activities of the Department of Public Information, as well as the quality of its Interim Head, whose clarity of vision and creativity we admire and who remains at all times accessible and open to dialogue.

3. Speaking for a moment on behalf of my country, I should like to express my gratitude for the fact that, 10 days ago, during the coup d'état against the Head of State of Venezuela, President Hugo Chávez Frías, and the restoration of the constitutional order in my country, the Department's first-rate professional staff placed themselves at the disposal of the international media and our Permanent Mission to ensure that we could be heard. In such times of crisis, the strength of information services is measured by their speed of action and their objectivity.

4. I can assure you that the Department of Public Information is ready to play its role and has done so faultlessly, and I want to pay tribute publicly to its Interim Head and to thank him for his leadership.

5. Returning to the agenda of this twenty-fourth session of the Committee, I should first like to place our work this year in its context, in order to emphasize its importance for the future of the United Nations.

6. The role of our Committee is essential, for in the twenty-first century no public organization can be strong and effective without communication. The founding fathers of the United Nations were not mistaken when, in 1946, they decided to give the Secretariat a strong Department of Public Information. In today's world of universal, instant, interactive communication, however, information has become the unavoidable link among humankind. Communication is transparent and continuous, one of the preconditions for communities' participation in the life of the international community. For global public opinion, it opens the doors to an understanding of the complex realities of globalization.

7. While emphasizing the tremendous liberating force of information, however, I also wish to draw attention to the perils of disinformation. Our Committee already did so last year in appealing to States to prevent information from being used to undermine democracy, promote ethnic conflict and xenophobia and incite hatred. Just as true peace is not only the absence of war, so conflict prevention involves not only curbing the arms race and concluding diplomatic agreements but also, and perhaps above all, ensuring that all peoples share the same fundamental values, such as freedom, equality, solidarity and tolerance, solemnly proclaimed in the Millennium Declaration. That is why the United Nations must have an information policy that serves to disseminate our common values and efforts to ensure that they prevail throughout the world.

8. Not long ago, in a televised interview, the Secretary-General told a journalist that he was optimistic about the possibilities of achieving the Millennium goals, specifically that of halving poverty in the world by the year 2015, because ultimately that depended on public opinion everywhere becoming aware of them.

9. It is the distinction of our Committee to justify the Secretary-General's optimism and strengthen the Organization's voice so that it is heard by peoples everywhere and so that the goals of the Millennium Declaration become a reality for everyone.

10. I would add that the Committee on Information has traditionally asked the Secretariat to ensure that particular attention is paid to the needs of the countries of the South. The Committee is very much aware of the gap that exists between developing and developed countries with regard to information and communication technologies and it is grateful for the initiatives taken by the Secretary-General to bridge this gap with a view to stimulating economic growth. Last December, the General Assembly expressed appreciation for the convening of a World Summit on the Information Society. It will be the Committee's task to consider what role the Department of Public Information should play in preparations for the Summit.

11. Our Committee has a unique opportunity this year to strengthen the voice of the United Nations and thus the common values of humankind for which the Organization speaks.

12. Indeed, as he announced to the regional groups this March, the Secretary-General has taken the initiative of launching a new round of reforms to mark the beginning of his new term of office. He has asked the Member States to support this reform process, which includes the comprehensive review of the Department of Public Information requested by the General Assembly on 24 December 2001.

13. The Committee's Bureau has therefore decided that this session's general debate should identify priorities for the Department's policies and new programming options for better achieving its goal of informing people throughout the world about the principles and activities of the United Nations. The Bureau has also noted the Secretary-General's new and determinedly frank tone with regard to information and communication, which will provide a basis for this debate. The Interim Head of the Department has informed the Bureau that the comprehensive review of the Department began in January of this year.

Annex II

Statement by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information at the opening of the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on Information, held on 22 April 2002

1. I am honoured once again to work with our distinguished Chairman, Milos Alcalay, who has assumed additional responsibilities this year as Chairman of the Group of 77 and China. I would especially like to thank him and the distinguished members of the Committee's Bureau for their support throughout for the work of the Department.

2. You may recall that when I addressed you last year, I had served as the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information for only a few months, following the departure of my distinguished predecessor, Kensaku Hogen. With the experience of, and insight into, the Department's work which I have gained over this last year, I hope to address constructively with you the issues which are foremost on your minds — and to gain your understanding and support for a newly focused Department. Under the Chairman's guidance, and with the active participation of all members, I am confident that the Department will be steered in the right direction, one which will permit it to achieve the mandate for which it was created in 1946 by General Assembly resolution 13 (I), to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among the peoples of the world.

3. We are meeting at an unusually interesting time in the history of the Secretariat, in the first year of a successful Secretary-General's second term in office, as the Organization repositions itself for even greater relevance as the indispensable global institution of our globalizing twenty-first century. The Department of Public Information is key to this continuing transformation. At the same time, many Member States have called for changes in the Department, some suggesting a streamlining of its operations, others asking for it to do more, particularly in the developing world. This debate, I regret to say, is not a new one. Over the years, the work of the United Nations in the field of public information has often come under the close scrutiny of Member States, who have historically been divided on the subject. It may amuse you to note that in 1960, Professor Leon Gordenker of Princeton University wrote an analysis of what was then the Office of Public Information (OPI) in the *American Political Science Review*. He noted that soon after the United Nations was established, the policy and budget of this forerunner of the Department became "the perennial centre of a complex debate", with the level of expenditure for public information activities being challenged in the budgetary committees as early as 1948. In this debate, a clear "clash" emerged on issues of substance, priorities and funding. In Professor Gordenker's words, "those Governments which stood primarily for economy joined others, which objected to the content of the OPI programme, to demand lower information appropriations. They were opposed by a majority, including all the Latin American States and many underdeveloped countries, which supported both the substance of the information programme and the budget". However, despite the repeated debate and attacks, Professor Gordenker observed that the Office proved "enduring and resilient". He wrote this 42 years ago.

4. As the French like to say, "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose". Some Committee members may not be aware that since that time in the Department's history, and particularly in the last 20 years, it has been the subject of at least seven periodic reviews and reappraisals, with a major restructuring carried out in 1987-1988. Yet, despite these attempts at reform, the Department continues to face criticism, often characterized by the point of view that the Department's functions are not central to the purposes of the Organization and may therefore be curtailed. Obviously, this point of view is not widely held in this Committee, but it often prevails in the financial and administrative bodies, where some delegates prefer to give priority to funding other activities of the Organization. As a result, we have been caught in the paradoxical situation of receiving specific mandates from the Committee on Information in the annual draft resolutions submitted to the General Assembly, while, in the same session, attempts are made in other legislative bodies to curtail the resources required to fulfil these very mandates.

5. As you know, this critical view of the Department climaxed last December during consideration of its programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003. While,

in the end, the General Assembly approved the relevant section of the programme budget, in the same resolution, resolution 56/253 of Christmas Eve 2001, it requested the Secretary-General to conduct a comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department. We in the Secretariat, and I personally, embraced the proposal for a review as an opportunity to examine the Department's overall effectiveness and efficiency, its focus on the substantive priorities and mandates of the Organization and the need for greater coordination within the Secretariat on public information activities. The report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2002/2), which is before the Committee, therefore sets out the Secretary-General's vision for the direction in which he hopes to take a "transformed" Department of Public Information — one with renewed focus and a greater clarity of purpose.

6. I know that I hardly need to point out here that the review of the Department is part of a broader, second round of reform launched by the Secretary-General at the beginning of his second term. With a view to strengthening and revitalizing the Organization, the entire Secretariat will carry out a candid re-examination of all its major activities. Our Department's exercise fits into this overall reform process and its results will form part of the comprehensive report which the Secretary-General will submit to the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly later this year, to propose institutional, programmatic and administrative improvements in our work.

7. In addition, there s no doubt that the results of several other reviews which are being carried out independently from that of the Department, including those relating to United Nations system library services, Secretariat publications and the Organization's commercial activities, will have an impact on the work of our Department. There is also a review of the United Nations information centres currently being carried out by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, whose report is expected shortly. In view of this series of reviews, it is now more critical than ever before that the Committee on Information provide its expert guidance regarding what it sees as the core communications functions of the Department.

8. The Secretary-General has delegated to me the authority to establish the parameters and necessary procedures for conducting the comprehensive review of the Department. In doing so, I wish to reassure Committee members that I have not been driven by budgetary considerations in working on the reform, nor has this been conceived as a cost-cutting exercise. The review is aimed at greater efficiency and effectiveness and if the possibility of savings arises along the way, such measures would be implemented. But what is essential here is that the Department demonstrate its ability to adapt to a changing world, demonstrate its willingness to learn and to change and make an honest effort to use its resources to obtain the maximum impact possible.

9. In carrying out the comprehensive review, and with the expert pro bono assistance of a highly regarded management consulting firm, we made a serious effort to ask ourselves the following question: if we had to reinvent the Department from scratch, how would we do it? Which activities would we emphasize and why? What are the functions that most Member States would want to see us perform in the service of the substantive goals of the Organization?

10. Some answers are obvious. Even if the Department of Public Information were abolished, the United Nations would still need the ability to convey news of its work to the mass media; to provide authoritative accounts of its deliberations and actions to the press, public, Governments and academia; to set up facilities to accredit, house, supply and guide the media based at United Nations Headquarters locations; to provide written information, visual images and sound to those media not based at such locations; and to respond to queries from media and members of the public across the world. Today, we must add to this the capacity to maintain an attractive and functional web site on the Internet. These core tasks are inescapable and not even our severest critics would suggest that the United Nations could survive without the capacity to perform them. But how we perform them, and to what extent, are matters for judgement. Do we, for instance, issue press releases covering every official meeting that takes place at the United Nations, or should we confine ourselves to major events and conferences? If the latter, how do we decide what to cover without causing offence to Member States? Do we provide audio-visual coverage of every statement made by every delegate, or only film, record and photograph those speakers in whom there is prior evidence of media interest? If we were a purely commercial press relations agency, our decisions would clearly differ from the ones we would be inclined to make as a

politically conscious Secretariat, responsive to the wishes of Member States.

11. The issues become more complicated as we move beyond the unavoidable functions to the desirable ones. In order not to be merely reactive to events, do we need a capacity to elaborate a communications strategy? If so, do we need communicators with background knowledge in each of the major priority areas of the Organization, who are able to convey to ordinary people the nuances of our efforts in promoting such issues as sustainable development and disarmament? Given the importance of the various conferences and special sessions called by the General Assembly, do we need a capacity to advocate their goals? My inclination would be to answer "yes" to these questions.

12. Then come the traditional activities, which, to use an American expression, come "with the territory" — guided tours for visitors, briefing programmes for visiting school and college groups, a capacity to arrange exhibits prepared by United Nations bodies and outside groups here at Headquarters and staff capable of mounting seminars, concerts or commemorations of special occasions. No comparable Organization or ministry anywhere in the world can do without such elements. Add to them administrative staff to help manage the personnel and budgets of the Department and you suddenly find you have three quarters of the Headquarters structure of the Department of Public Information.

13. What do you not have, in this imaginary exercise, which the existing Department of Public Information possesses in reality? The list is short: a library, established by the General Assembly and aimed principally at serving delegations and the staff; a cartographic section, housed in the Department but serving principally the political and peacekeeping departments; and several publications, some as old as the Organization itself. Of course, the Library is also mandated to oversee a system of depository libraries and to provide reference tools for the public at large; the cartographers' maps are accessible to the public; and our various publications are information tools with wide-ranging audiences. Finally, there are the information centres around the world, themselves created by the General Assembly to bring the Department's outreach directly to the peoples of nations far removed geographically from United Nations Headquarters.

14. In other words, you end up with something very much like the present Department of Public Information.

15. If these, the basic elements of the Department of Public Information are therefore largely immutable, what should we do differently? For the last two and a half months, my senior colleagues, with whom I have worked closely in the course of this review, and I have grappled with all these questions, assisted by the expert consultants, who conducted over 70 interviews with Department staff, senior Secretariat officials, representatives of Member States and many individuals representing a range of the Department's clients, including other Departments and Offices, diplomats, media and representatives of non-governmental organizations. The report before you spells out our principal findings and insights. Now it is up to you, members of the Committee, to give us your thoughts on these matters, to tell us what you expect from the Department of Public Information.

16. The Secretary-General has put forward his vision on how to position the Department of Public Information for greater impact in the report on the reorientation that you have before you. This report, which represents a first step in the comprehensive review of the Department, outlines several important issues and questions which emerge from the in-depth analysis and assessment of the Department which has just been completed. These relate to a lack of clarity around the Department's mission; the existence of fragmented activities with unclear linkage to a coherent overall strategy; a limited capacity to understand whether our programmes and activities match "customer" needs and an organizational structure which does not make clear to external constituencies who does what in the Department, and how its components and relevant parts of the rest of the Secretariat work together. The aim of the report is to highlight the main issues and findings which have emerged so far, and to define new directions and the broad areas of focus for the Department. It does not contain proposals for changes in organizational structure which may result from the review, as these still remain to be elaborated. In continuation of the "town hall" meetings which I have held over the last year with Department staff, I have asked them to join me in another meeting at the conclusion of this session, so that I may brief them on the Committee's views on our reform process and obtain their input and ideas as to the way forward. It is the strong view of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General

that the participation of staff in the reform process is essential and that they must feel they are first-string players on a strengthened team if we are to be successful in transforming the Department.

17. In the present circumstances, it did not seem appropriate to set out a long list of the Department's successes, of which we continue to be proud. These can be found in last September's report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/56/411). The Committee's support for the Department's many activities and products is also reiterated in General Assembly resolution 56/64 B. However, in order to update you with regard to some of our most recent innovations and to give you a picture of our current work, I would like to invite the members of the Committee to join us this afternoon in Conference Room 5 from 3 to 5 p.m. for an informal briefing, which I trust you will find informative.

18. In the context of the review of the Department of Public Information, we asked ourselves the most fundamental and searching questions. Why, for example, is it important for the United Nations to have a Department of Public Information? The basic justification for establishing an information structure within the Secretariat can still be found in General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, which I quoted at the beginning of my statement. To achieve its objectives, the United Nations relies on an understanding of its activities on the part of the public at large. As the Secretary-General has frequently pointed out, the United Nations Charter begins with the words "We the peoples" and it is in the support of the peoples of the world that the survival of the United Nations lies. Strong communications outreach is therefore critical for the Organization. From my first days in the Department I have said to my staff that they do not come to work here to write a press release, design a poster or put up a web site. They come to work in the Department of Public Information, I tell them, because without their work the substantive purposes of the United Nations would not be fulfilled. Peacekeeping would not succeed if people did not understand what the peacekeepers were trying to do and how they were doing it; the battle against poverty would not be won if people in the developed world were not aware of the great challenge of development and people in developing countries could not appreciate the Organization's efforts to help resolve their problems. The activities of the Department are not, in other words, ends in themselves; they serve as a means to help the United Nations fulfil its substantive goals.

19. Some delegations have pointed out to me that their own countries have dispensed with their old Ministries of Information; they argue that the United Nations perhaps does not need one either. But the Department of Public Information is working to reach people in every region of the world, to garner their support for the work of the Organization. This is especially relevant in developing countries, where vast segments of the population still are not part of the information and technology revolution. In this outreach, we must also fulfil a multitude of mandates, as well as win intergovernmental support for the specific actions we are taking.

20. The challenge is how to organize the Department to work most effectively on the broad front expected of it. While there is no question that our specific objectives can be refocused and our working methods improved, we in the Department are seeking the continuing support of the Committee for the important role of communications and public information in the life of our Organization. Your renewed commitment to the need for enhanced communications in a new information age and to developing a culture of communications within the Organization is essential for us to succeed. I am confident that if we work together we can find solutions to give the United Nations the "voice" that the world must be able to hear. At the same time, this voice risks being muffled in a multitude of mandates and we seek your understanding in helping us to focus our energies on the most crucial of them.

21. On behalf of my Department, I am calling upon the Committee on Information, at this first stage of the comprehensive review, to endorse the broad directions of our reorientation, embodied in particular in the redefined aspirations of the Department. These are captured in the following proposed mission statement, which you will find in paragraph 19 of the Secretary-General's report. It reads: "The Department of Public Information's mission is to manage and coordinate United Nations communications content — generated by the activities of the Organization and its component parts — and strategically to convey this content, especially through appropriate intermediaries, to achieve the greatest public impact."

22. These words may not be poetry, but this mission statement is built around the concept that the content

which the Department must communicate is generated by the substantive work of the Organization — and not by the Department itself. The Department of Public Information, as the manager and coordinator of United Nations communications strategy, is responsible for connecting the work of the substantive departments with those best positioned as disseminators. As a result, it is not the responsibility of the Department to create the substantive content or to reinvent the priorities of the Organization. These you will find summarized in paragraph 22 of the report, and they are established by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, in accordance with those set out in the Millennium Declaration. Instead, the critical work of the Department of Public Information is to disseminate throughout the world the core messages of the Organization. In this effort, the Department's communications outreach will include all the breaking news from the Organization, as well as the focus on the long-term challenges faced by humankind and how the United Nations will address them in the framework of the Millennium Declaration. In the context of this mission, the Department will be expected to conceptualize and strategize, to "market" if you will, these priorities, using intermediaries, such as the mass media, to the greatest possible effect. All of our efforts will be judged against this template. And through the United Nations Communications Group, we will strengthen our partnership with the information offices of the rest of the United Nations system to ensure that we build on each other's efforts and speak with one voice.

23. The traditional media and the Internet are being utilized by the Department, as in, for instance, the live radio programme, which has a huge potential listenership, and the United Nations News Centre (in English and French) and its e-mail list of correspondents — a new initiative just launched two weeks ago. We have also made progress in enriching the United Nations web sites with the specific aim of reducing the gap between the use of English and the other five official languages of the Organization.

24. Multilingualism in public information emerged as a priority concern of the Committee at last year's session. The problems and resource constraints which have restricted our ability to satisfy you fully in this area are well known. To facilitate your discussion in this regard, I am pleased to inform you that we are distributing this morning, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/64 B, a conference room paper on the use and command of all six official languages by the staff of the Department of Public Information.

25. The proposed new mission statement for the Department has inspired the first phase of our reform and we are now evaluating our activities and processes in relation to this new paradigm. As part of this analysis, a number of significant policy options for which the Committee's guidance is required have been raised. These issues are outlined in detail in the Secretary-General's report, but I would like to highlight three of the most important: our audiences, or target groups; the work of the United Nations information centres; and performance measurement of Department programmes and activities.

26. First, the Department must better identify its target audiences. In line with our new approach, our primary targets must increasingly be the "external intermediaries", the media and civil society, through whom we would seek to reach the world. The report seeks the Committee's guidance on the extent to which the Department should remain responsible for other activities that serve other "clients", including delegations.

27. In an attempt to allocate our resources more effectively and to achieve greater effectiveness in programme delivery, some hard decisions and choices will have to be made. Some activities may need to be discontinued or drastically reduced. Alternatively, there may be a case to transfer certain activities elsewhere within the Secretariat. Within the Department itself, some consolidation of functions may be necessary.

28. Questions concerning some of the Department's traditional activities have arisen during the review. For example, we must be sure that our leading publications, such as the *Yearbook of the United Nations* and the *United Nations Chronicle*, as well as direct outreach activities, such as the special events, exhibits and the guided tour operation at Headquarters locations, are having the desired impact, commensurate with the level of resources devoted to those activities. In certain instances, these activities reach relatively limited audiences. Nonetheless, Member States value and have grown accustomed to some of these activities and consider them worthwhile for reasons outside strict cost considerations. The views of the Committee will be valuable in this respect, as the Department reviews the relative importance of these activities.

29. The second special area of review concerns the United Nations information centres. As this operation

accounts for approximately 35 per cent of the Department's budget and is of particular interest to many members of the Committee on Information, it warrants detailed consideration. The information centres are the voice of the United Nations in the field and as such are central to the Department's ability to convey information in a way that is accessible to local audiences around the world. The centres' activities, however, are now being performed in a changing environment, owing to the immediate and almost universal availability of information via the electronic media. And where our target audience is the mass media and leading civil society institutions, and not directly the person on the street, we can comfortably use the Internet as a means of communication and dissemination in virtually every country of the world. The United Nations web site in the six official languages has therefore contributed to addressing the needs for the Organization's information materials in many countries. It will therefore be necessary to analyse the cost and benefits of information centres as they relate to the needs of their local audiences. The creation of regional information centre hubs would merit consideration. Also, the high costs of rental space for centres in developed countries will need to be addressed, as we seek to get the most value for the limited resources at our disposal.

30. As the Secretary-General's report on reorientation explains, performance management must be a vital part of all the Department's major activities and programmes and I intend to place greater emphasis on evaluation of the impact of our activities. This is particularly important in view of the new culture within the Organization of results-based budgeting and programme evaluation. As an important step in this direction, the Department of Public Information was the first department to organize a workshop on evaluation techniques for all its programme managers in January of this year. I also propose to carry out an annual programme impact review to justify which programmes should be maintained, expanded or eliminated. This will permit us to gauge more accurately the return on our investments and to emphasize activities of high impact and low cost in carrying out our functions. These new efforts will provide a tool in the future for the Secretariat and Member States to make enlightened choices regarding the information services which the Department provides.

31. Let me stress that the Committee on Information has a key role to play in the reform of the Department of Public Information. After this session of the Committee, taking into account your views, I will be in a position to finalize the proposed plan for the reform of the Department and prepare recommendations for the consideration of the Secretary-General.

32. The Secretary-General will then take decisions on the next steps and for those measures which are under his authority, implementation will begin immediately. For those measures requiring legislative approval, and as a second stage, proposals will be included in his report on the comprehensive review of the entire Secretariat to the next session of the General Assembly. The final results of the reform process will become a road map for the preparation of the proposed programme budget for 2004-2005 and a revision as required of the medium-term plan for 2002-2005, which was prepared, of course, back in 2000, at a time when we worked under very different assumptions.

33. Reform, as the Secretary-General has often pointed out, is a process, not an event. I have no illusions, nor should you, that we can reinvent the Department of Public Information overnight. When all is said and done and the changes we have begun are implemented, it is my expectation that the Department of Public Information will be a very different department from the one which I headed when the Committee on Information met last year. The Department will be repositioned to work more strategically, as an effective vehicle to communicate the work of the United Nations. There will be greater clarity in its work and more effective integration with other parts of the Secretariat. To achieve this, we will dedicate our attention to departmental communication strategies on priority themes, we will provide focused communication guidance to the departments and we will set out the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Public Information in a clear manner to all our clients. The staff of the Department will have the opportunity to be trained to carry out new functions, where necessary, and will be better integrated with their colleagues working in other areas of the Department. The repositioning of the Department of Public Information will not come without some transitional pain and a certain amount of re-learning, but we think it is the best way to ensure that the United Nations has the most effective communications mechanisms in place and to ensure that the Department becomes a leading voice in communicating the work of the United Nations to the world's public. Even as this vision is being shaped, it is

essential that we work together with the members of this Committee to make this a reality.

34. In concluding, I must express my personal hope that, after this comprehensive review, Member States will give us the necessary time to implement what we have set out to do. Many of my able and talented staff feel they have been collectively targeted by being subject to continuous criticisms and reviews which their colleagues in other departments have not been obliged to endure. You will understand that continuous criticism, particularly if it appears to be based on extraneous considerations, can have a demoralizing impact on hard-working colleagues. Let us recognize the good work they are doing and let us give them a chance, through this process, to do even better what the Organization wants them to do. This will require a team effort by all concerned — from Department staff, to Secretariat colleagues and our key partners, most importantly Member States.

35. The reformed — or I should say — transformed Department of Public Information will be one which is a stronger, faster and more efficient operation than in the past, more in tune with the needs of the United Nations and its Member States. I am hopeful that the positive and creative results of this session will help to give a new direction to the Department and I will listen attentively. And with your support, perhaps we can once and for all put an end to the incessant criticism about the Department of Public Information and empower the Department to live up to the expectations that you and the public at large have of our important information and communications work.

36. It is in this frame of mind that my staff and I eagerly look forward to hearing your views and, in the process, to further strengthening the spirit of cooperation between the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information in pursuit of our common objectives.

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